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ABSTRACT

Guidelines are presented of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) that illustrates to parents and community members of local school councils how they can advocate for and get real capital improvements to their local schools. A nine-step process is detailed for increasing capital investment in local schools. Steps include setting up a facilities committee, evaluating school building conditions and the building's influence on school environment, organizing for overcrowding, putting together a plan for capital improvements to the school, presenting the CIP to the local school council and the broader school community, and monitoring plan implementation. (GR)

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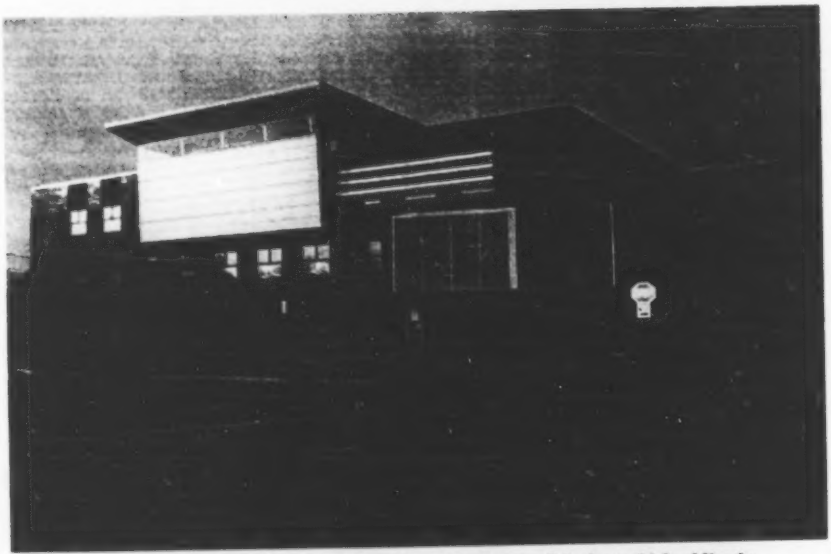
From The Ground Up

A handbook for organizing for capital Improvements to your public schools



Little Village Academy built in 1996. Designed by Ross Barney CJankowski Architects

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From the Ground Up:
A Handbook for Organizing for Getting Capital Improvements at Your Public School
Prepared By: The Neighborhood Capital Budget Group
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What is NCBG?

The Neighborhood Capital Budget Group is a city-wide organization that assists neighborhood groups throughout Chicago in increasing the amount of public and private investment in their communities. In particular, NCBG helps community-based organizations, local community development corporations, and Local School Councils participate in the Capital Improvement Programs of the City of Chicago and the Chicago Public Schools. These are two vital sources of potentially millions of public capital dollars for physical improvement projects in our neighborhoods. In turn, these public investments can help to attract and leverage private investment in neighborhood redevelopment projects, improve the appearance of our neighborhoods, the functionality of our public facilities, such as schools and libraries, and literally shore up the brick and mortar foundation of our communities. NCBG offers ongoing technical assistance to community based organizations ("CBOs"), community development corporations ("CDCs"), and local school councils ("LSCs") in capital planning, asset-based community planning, and leadership development. NCBG works with community groups and institutions to enhance their local capacity to plan and implement community redevelopment strategies.

Introduction to the Chicago Public Schools' Capital Improvement Program("CIP")

This guide is intended to help the parent and community members of local school councils understand how they can advocate for and get real capital improvements to their local school. Beginning in January 1996, the Chicago Public Schools ("CPS") established as official policy a five-year "Capital Improvement Program" ("CIP") to renovate school buildings in disrepair, upgrade school facilities, or carry out new construction to alleviate overcrowding. By the Spring of 1998, the Chicago Public Schools had raised nearly $1.7 billion in capital funds to undertake school repairs and new school construction. The CPS CIP has evolved from a rough sketch of hoped-for capital improvements, to a detailed annual capital budget of $742 million for Fiscal Year 1999 alone, and a companion longer-range plan through the CPS's Fiscal Year 2003. (The final fiscal year of the CIP coincides with the 2002-2003 school year.) The CIP is now a user-friendly document, providing a profile of each school in the CPS system, along with which capital improvements have been planned, implemented, and what is being budgeted for the current year. The CIP document is also now accessible via the Internet.

The address is: **"http://www.csc.cps.k12.il.us/capital"**

Based on community input, the CPS increased the size of the FY1999 capital budget from a proposed appropriation of $558 million to $742 million, reflecting the outpouring of capital improvement requests from schools around the City. Now, there is an established policy of holding annual public hearings to help the CPS update and revise the CIP each year. Local School Councils and members of the public are invited to take part in public hearings every Spring, and formally submit requests for additional physical improvements to their school facilities. There is also a permanent Citizens' Advisory Committee to CPS on matters relating to the CIP, called the "Blue Ribbon Committee," comprised of community and LSC members, educators, members of the business community, and CPS policy makers. To contact the CPS

Capital Program Office, call:

Timothy Martin	**Chief Operating Officer**
773-553-2900	**Fax 773-553-2901**
Giacomo Mancuso	**Director of Capital Planning**
773-553-3270	**Fax 773-553-3261**

What is a "Capital" Improvement? Typically, "capital improvement" requests are for large expenditures that extend the useful life of a physical facility, rather than "maintenance" or "operating" expenses, the smaller expenditures that come up from day to day during the school year. For example, a major repair or replacement of a roof is a capital improvement. Painting the interior hallways or classrooms is a maintenance expenditure. Buying a computer is an operating expense, but re-wiring the building, or upgrading the electrical service in the school, would be a capital investment. The CIP lays out several categories of capital expenditures for which funds are appropriated through the annual Capital Improvement Budget. The CIP will also tell you which major improvement projects the CPS is forecasting for your building over the next five years.

How do we get started on the process of rebuilding our school "From the Ground Up"? In working with community and parents leaders throughout Chicago's public school system, NCBG has catalogued some basic steps that every LSC can take to secure increased capital investment in your school.

First Steps

Step 1. ***Set up a Facilities Committee***

Setting up a Facilities Committee can seem like a big first step. But it is a very necessary one. You need a team of interested people who are willing to devote some of their time to resolving problems of disrepair, desired facilities upgrades, or overcrowding in your school.

Important Note: Don't work alone. Working alone isolates you from others who can provide support and labor to get the job done. Working with a solid core of people also helps create a well rounded understanding of the problem -- based on the experience of a variety of people -- and a good source of alternative approaches to fixing the problem you've identified in your school.

The purposes of the Facilities Committee are to:

* Evaluate the overall condition of your school building.
* Understand your schools' educational needs as expressed in your annual "School Improvement Plan for Advancing Academic Achievement" ("SIPAAA" or SIP).
* Determine if your school building is serving your basic educational needs.
* Identify what changes in your school building may be needed to better address or achieve your SIP goals.

Step 2. ***Building the Team***
There are key people you should seek to include as part of your team The Facilities

Committee should be composed of:

* One or more representatives of the Local School Council
* The Principal
* Your school's building engineer
* Interested parents
* Interested students
* Community leaders from the surrounding neighborhood

If any of these key stakeholders in your school community are unable to devote the time to participate fully in the facilities committee, make sure they are well informed about the status of your efforts. You will eventually be relying on them for continued support.

Organizing for school repairs

Step 3. ***Evaluate the Condition of Your School Building***

You will need to talk to a number of people to track down this information. You will also need to talk to some City as well as Chicago Public School personnel. Be patient but be insistent, persistent, and consistent. Be pro active in asking for help and information from CPS and City staff. Don't ever forget: Public employees are working for you. Listen carefully to what they tell you, and always take notes when you talk to someone and remember, "Get it in writing!". . .

Seek out answers to the following questions about your school building;

* Does your school have any Fire Code violations?
* Does it have any Building Code violations?
* Are there any health code violations in the building? Lead and asbestos are the most common, and often cause the greatest concern.

If the answers to any of these questions is "YES," then what steps are being taken to resolve these violations? What is the status of each problem situation? For example, if there are Building Code violations, is a Building Court date set? Are there repairs underway, and when will they be completed? Are there funds budgeted to carry out the necessary corrective measures? Are repairs scheduled for a future year in the CIP, but not yet funded? Below are contact numbers that will be useful in answering some of the above questions:

The Chicago Fire Department
Kenneth Wideman Deputy Commissioner
Bureau of Fire Prevention
Public Education Unit
1010 South Clinton Chicago, IL 60607
312-747-6691/92(voice)
312-747-331(fax)

This department is involved with the inspection of school buildings

Building and Land Use Litigation Division
30 North LaSalle Street, Room 700
Chicago, Illinois 60602
Telephone: (312) 744-8791
Facsimile: (312) 744-1054

This is the division of the Corporation Counsels office or, the Law Dept. for the City, that is responsible for prosecuting building code and fire code violations

Or contact NCBG for technical assistance (312) 939-7198.

Step 4. ***How does our building condition affect the school environment?***

Finally, you must ask the most important question: Is each classroom an optimal setting for learning? This is a very important question to answer. It goes to the very core of what a school is for learning. During the first two years of the Chicago Public Schools' Capital Improvement Program, CPS has focused on securing your building against the elements. Buildings were in such disrepair that the urgent needs were to make sure that the roof does not leak when it rains or snows, that windows are securely closed to cold air in the winter and can open if necessary in the spring or summer. But what will ultimately be of greatest concern to you is how exterior renovation and interior renovation work together to make the school a healthy environment and a setting in which children can learn and study without distracted by the condition of the school building. In fact, building and facility improvements beyond just the urgent repairs are often needed to support the efforts of teachers and children in the educational process taking place in the classroom.

Evaluate the following basic elements of the school and the classrooms:

* Do classrooms, labs, other special purpose areas, and hallways have enough light?
* Are ventilation and air circulation adequate?
* Is the school free of distracting sounds or visual distractions?
* Is the temperature in the school building adequate and comfortable?
* Is the electrical system adequate to run all needed equipment, such as computers, copiers, etc.?
* Is there sufficient room for the number of students per class?
* Are there adequate facilities for teacher preparation, parent/teacher conferences, or other special events?
* Are there adequate facilities for specific activities identified in your SIP?

Look inside the building "envelope," the walls, windows, and roof, to the heart of the instructional day. After all, this is what the Capital Improvement Program should ultimately achieve. Taking that hard look yourselves is an important part of the work of your Facilities Committee.

Renovation

The Chicago Public Schools' Capital Improvement Program provides the plans and the funds to undertake major renovation to existing school buildings, as well as new construction of additions or new schools. To determine if your school needs a "Major Capital Renovation" project, sometimes referred to by CPS staff as an "MCR" project, ask the following questions:

* Are the needed repairs investments that should be done once every five years? Every 10 years?
* Do needed repairs affect the teachers ability to conduct class in individual rooms? How many classrooms are affected?
* Does the existing electrical system in the building support all of the computers, copiers, etc. that you plan to have in place over the next year to five years?
* Does the building "envelope" (i.e., the exterior masonry, most of the windows and their framing, and/or the roof) need major repair?
* Does the heating plant repeatedly breakdown, keep the building too hot, or operate inefficiently?

Most of our public schools need a major capital renovation. But, be prepared to itemize the details of what you want included in your MCR project. If your school is already listed in the CPS CIP for a major capital renovation, ask exactly what major repairs will be included, and make sure that all of the major problems your Facilities Committee has identified are included in the "package."

"Operations and Maintenance" ("O & M") Funds

The Chicago Public Schools identifies O & M expenses as repairs that need to occur on an annual or recurring basis, and are routine in nature to sustain the good repair of the building. These monies are budgeted for separately from the funds that are budgeted in the CPS CIP. These O & M expenses will include, but may not be limited to: Painting, minor plumbing repairs, spot plastering, repair or replacement of standard fixtures, heating system cleaning and "tune ups," replacement of broken window panes or locks, etc.

Maintenance of the exterior grounds of the school is a question sometimes ignored by many people. It can entail routine O & M expenditures, or there may be a major capital improvement project, such as the construction of a new playground, playing field, or campus park. If your school has a new playground or playing field built, then maintenance of these facilities over time should also be taken into account. A good O & M plan is a form of insurance. It's a way of protecting the capital improvement investment that's being made in your school, and will enhance its lifespan. Remember, many of our schools got into bad shape because too little attention was paid to routine, year-in, year-out maintenance.

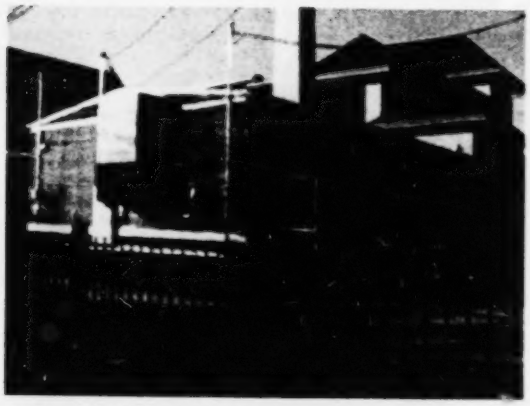
Organizing for Overcrowding

This section is going to deal with overcrowding as a specific organizing problem. Your school may have both overcrowding and major repair issues. If so continue on ,if not, please jump to Step 5.

Overcrowding has become a serious problem for public schools throughout Chicago. Many diverse communities are confronting the problem that their local elementary and high schools do not have adequate space for the number of children who live in the attendance area of a given school. Overcrowding has persisted in some schools for a decade or more. During the 1960s and 1970s, many temporary structures were built to satisfy the need for classroom space. Now, many years later, these structures have long outlived their usefulness and are seriously deteriorating. If such a temporary structure has to be closed or removed because of serious disrepair, which has actually occurred at some schools, then a school might find itself once again overcrowded.

It is important to know "the numbers." The Chicago Public Schools regards a school building as being overcrowded if its enrollment exceeds 80% of the school's "design capacity." The design capacity number is the number of students which the building was originally designed to accommodate.

Unfortunately, given the special programs and needs of our student body today, "design capacity" may no longer be a true measure of how much space you need to do a good job or educating your children. Different school communities have unique and locally designed SIPs, or School Improvement Plans, to advance the academic achievement of their particular student body. In short, each school will have not just a "design capacity," but a "program capacity," i.e., the number of students whose educational needs can be adequately addressed in the current facility, may actually be less than the number of students that were originally envisioned as attending that school twenty, thirty, fifty, or a hundred years ago.



Mobile unit typically used for relief of overcrowding

It is also important to understand how the "design capacity" figures were calculated and why they were calculated in a specific way. Ask your principal, teachers and LSC about the program capacity of your building. The principal is likely to have been informed what the "design capacity" of the building is supposed to be. If not, ask staff from the CPS Central Office for the "design capacity" figure, and whether your school is designated as overcrowded or severely overcrowded. The page in the 1999-2003 CIP which describes your school's capital improvement allocations, also includes a brief "Building Assessment" statement. It may state if the CPS regards your school building as overcrowded.

Whenever you ask for information from a public agency, ask their personnel to give you the information in writing. This is an important step if your Facilities Committee team is going to be able to hold the CPS accountable. Remember, "Get it in writing!". Here is some other information you will need to get:

* How many students does your school have (i.e. enrollment)?
* How many students has your school had over the past 5 years?
* What are your programmatic constraints? (For example, Special Education or Bilingual Education will have specific space requirements.).

These are key indicators of your Program Capacity.

* What is CPS' official record of your capacity? (Remember, CPS will probably refer to "Design Capacity." See above.)

* Is your school or any of its buildings built as a temporary structure? (In many instances, additions built during the 1970s were built as temporary additions.)
* Is your school leasing other buildings to relieve overcrowding(e.g. empty Catholic schools)

Before you embark on a campaign to relieve your overcrowding situation, you need to look at the following questions and evaluate which of theses potential solutions would resolve the problem. Or you and your committee might come up with an alternative to all three.

Would overcrowding be satisfied by:

* Re-mapping attendance boundaries?
* Building an addition?
* Constructing a new school in your neighborhood?

Step 5. ***Put together a plan for Capital Improvements to your school.***

Once you have analyzed all the information important to understanding your school's facility needs, and you've discussed potential solutions, you can put together all of the information into a written plan. This will make up the bones and muscle of your testimony for the annual Capital Improvement Program public hearings, and represent your input into the CPS's planning to determine the size and extent of its annual capital improvement budget. You should include the following elements in your school's capital improvement plan:

Summarize the current condition of building:
List your most pressing concerns. As a team, discuss what your priorities are, which repairs are most needed, and what repairs are needed now, rather than later.
Identify your long term concerns. Explain how the capital improvements that you have prioritized are going to help improve or optimize the learning environment.
Outline an action plan: Your intent to participate in the public hearings, how you are going to inform the general parent body, whether you plan to seek support from other community leaders or elected officials, etc.

Step 6. ***Present your Facilities Committee Capital Improvement Plan to your Local School Council, and the broader school community.***

This is a very crucial step. In order to be successful in carrying out your plans, you need to broaden the work you are doing to an ever-widening circle of people. Putting the plan before the Local School Council gives them the opportunity to participate in the plan and brings with it a new set of allies to support the approval and implementation of the plan. At this point, your committee and the LSC can strategize about a variety of creative ways to present the plan to the school community at large. Answer these questions to help you think about what kind of outreach to do:

Who do you want to attend the meeting?

* Parents
* Neighbors of the school

* Community organizations
* Local elected officials (other than the LSC)
* Social service agencies, local businesses, other major community institutions, etc.

How can you get the word out to those people?

* Flyers
* Existing organizations (PTAs, churches, youth organizations, community groups)
* Informal networks: pre-school parents, parent volunteers.
* Local Businesses: Many area businesses are more than willing to support organizing efforts such as these
* Formal networks: Bilingual committee meetings, CAPS (community policing) meetings, local park advisory council meetings etc.

Step 7. ***Present your plan to CPS officials and Board of Trustee members and local elected officials at a School "Town Hall" meeting.***

You don't have to wait for the annual public hearings to introduce your plan to CPS officials. In fact, the more familiar CPS becomes with your community effort to devise and win support for the plan, the better it is. Just make sure that the parents and community at large have had some time to review and understand the plan, and offer suggested changes, before you plan or hold your town hall meeting.

Plan a "Town Hall" style meeting to help get everyone in the neighborhood excited about your vision for a better school. Invite CPS and local elected officials. Then, make a copy of your plan for each of the invitees whose support you are seeking. Mobilize your supporters to speak on behalf of the plan, and explain various elements of it. Remember: At every step of the process, when you publicly acknowledge the folks who have helped in this effort and made the plan possible, you and your committee are helping to build trust and consensus in the community. It is also important that everyone understand how the improvements for which you are calling will address and resolve existing problems in the school building, especially when the improvements that you are requesting will help you successfully implement your SIP and enhance the learning of the students.

Public hearing on Capital Improvements at Whitney Young H.S.

Step 8. ***Monitor the implementation of your plan.***

Once you have had a victory, it's still vitally important to be vigilant about how and when the work is done. Don't be shy about tracking people down. Taxpayers' dollars - your dollars -- are at stake, and so is the education of the children at your school.

Meet with the architects and general contractors that CPS will hire to carry out your capital improvements. Meet with school staff to gain insight on their constraints during repairs or construction. How will the construction projects affect the daily life of your school? Keep the broader school community, and nearby neighborhood residents, informed as to the status of your plan's implementation.

Beyond the School House Doors

When you step out of your school, what do you see? What is the condition of the surrounding neighborhood? Are the sidewalks broken? Does the alley or the street that serves the school need major repair? Is there good lighting around the school building? Does the street on which your school is located ever flood? Does that street suffer from heavy traffic flow that should be "calmed" or redirected for the safety of the students? These are other capital improvement needs and opportunities that your Facilities Committee may also want to assess, and address.

Such situations can have significant impact on the safety and viability of the school as a neighborhood institution and asset. The City of Chicago has its own "Capital Improvement Program". (So do the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Transit Authority.) As you assess the capital improvement needs of your school, take this opportunity to get the City and the public schools to work together on behalf of your school. Use the same process as described above to evaluate how the condition of the area surrounding your school is affecting your students and their families in using the school as an institution.

Remember: Call NCBG at (312) 939-7198, for technical assistance in getting capital improvements done by other local government agencies, such as City Hall, CTA, or the Park District.

Your Facilities Committee could take a "walking tour" of the neighborhood around your school to survey and document the condition of the following:

* Surrounding streets
* Sidewalks
* Alley ways
* Adjacent or nearby parks
* Adjacent or nearby public transportation
* Sewers
* Street lighting

Every year, the City of Chicago holds public hearings during the months of October and November to solicit capital improvement requests from community residents for its own CIP. NCBG will help you prepare for these hearings.

Step 9. ***Celebrate!***

Every time you succeed in gaining ground toward the realization of your school's capital plan, you need to celebrate that victory, no matter how small the progress may initially seem to you to be. Remember: This process requires insistence, persistence, and consistency on the part of the school community. Marking and celebrating the incremental steps along the way is crucial to sustaining the community's interest and support.

Send out a letter to all the participants after your town hall meeting. Put an ad in the local

paper thanking everyone who has helped write or review the plan, or who has endorsed it. Have a party for those who worked on creating the plan. Notify people when the CPS approves some or all of your plan's elements for inclusion in the annual CPS capital budget. Celebrate the groundbreaking. Commemorate the completion of the project. At that time, you may want to give out awards to some of the hard-working volunteers, teaching staff, the principal, CPS or elected officials who helped make your plan a reality.

A wise parent praises their child to the heavens each time they achieve the myriad small but significant milestones in life: Putting on your own coat, brushing your teeth by yourself. setting the dinner table, learning your ABCs, cleaning your room, helping a sibling with homework.

We all need to celebrate our communities' victories more than we do. Every time you celebrate a milestone, you are helping to build a sense of history, community identity, and achievement!

Northside Propatory High School - built in1998-99 as a magnet program serving the Northside of Chicago